



POLO GUIDE

CHUKKA'D OUT

The *Residents' Journal* takes a trip down to Ham Polo Club in Richmond to produce our official guide to all things polo



THAT'S POLO, DARLING *What we learned from a day on the sidelines*

THE DRESS CODE

Apart from a few special occasions, the dress code at Ham is smart casual, so while you'll still find the odd polo groupie dressed to the nines, smart jeans and sandals are perfectly acceptable, even in the exclusive members' clubhouse.

THE PARK-UP PICNIC

One of the best ways to enjoy the polo is to host a picnic out of the back of your car. Bring a blanket and some nibbles (or visit the Chukka Tukka van) and enjoy the action up close.

TREAD CAREFULLY

Newcomers to the world of polo may be excited to 'stomp down the tivots' (see the terminology column on page 21), but be warned: this process only happens once during each match, at half time. The commentators will usually announce it, but if in doubt,

wait for the experts to make their move. At all other times, keeping away from the boards that mark the edge of the pitch (the safety zone) is essential so that you don't interrupt play, or get trampled by a stampeding polo pony.

THAT BUSINESS OF CHANGING ENDS

The rule to switch ends after each goal was introduced to make it fair for teams playing on uneven pitches. It's confusing, yes, but, I've been told that even the players sometimes forget which goal they are supposed to be heading for, and mutterings of 'but weren't they just shooting the other way?' can often be heard even in the members' enclosure.

Sunday entry for spectators, £5 per person. Clubhouse and enclosure reserved for members and their guests only

MEET THE MASTER

Ham Polo Club chairman Nicholas Colquhoun-Denvers explains the roots of polo, and his club

'The modern sport of polo started in 1869, when a group of British army officers read an article in *The Field* about this crazy game called 'pulu' that was being played in north-east India. Someone had written about it, and these chaps, who were on exercise in Aldershot, thought it looked fun. They grabbed walking sticks and a billiard ball and went out to try it. At that stage, 'pulu' was only played in northern India, but within 25 years of its discovery by the British it had spread as far as New Zealand, Australia and America. Now, it's played in 77 countries around the world.

'We're very proud that Ham Polo Club is the last of the original 13 polo clubs in London, the rest of which were slowly squeezed out by urban development. The Hurlingham Club was our headquarters when we first started out, but after World War II, London councils purchased all of the land and one-by-one all the clubs except this one disappeared. We have the biggest catchment area of any British polo club, and you'll find more people here on a sunny day picnicking and watching polo than you'll ever see at any of the higher level goal clubs. We're a local club for local people, and that's what makes us special.'

The season at Ham Polo Club runs from the beginning of May through to the end of September

THE TERMINOLOGY

How to sound like you know what you're talking about

CHUKKA

Each match is split into seven-and-a-half-minute periods called chukkas, with three minutes between each, and five minutes at half time.

DIVOTS

Clumps of turf kicked up by the ponies' hooves (you tread these in at half time).

GOAL

Scored when the ball fully crosses the line between the goalposts, at any height, regardless of who knocks it through (man or pony).

HANDICAP

All players are rated from a minus two (lowest) to a 10 (highest) handicap, depending on their skills and horsemanship. Team handicaps are made up of the sum of the members' handicaps – lower rated teams in an unequal match are given extra goals on the scoreboard to even the odds.

HOOK

A move where a player uses their mallet to block, or interfere with, another player's swing.

LINE

'Crossing the line' (i.e. fouling the player closest to the imaginary line on which the ball is travelling) is the most frequent foul in polo.

PONIES

Although they're all more than 14.2 hands, polo horses are called 'ponies'.

POSITIONS

Each team has four players; players one and two are attackers, player four (or the 'back') plays in defence and player three (usually the highest rated on the team) switches between the two.

RIDE-OFF

When two players and their ponies make contact to try and push each other off the line of the ball.

RINGER

A player or pony who performs beyond expectations.

SAFETY ZONE

The area around the pitch that is out of bounds to spectators during play.

REVIEW: SADDLE UP

We learn the basics from Argentinian professional player Martin Roman

THE RIDE

Polo riding is a different skill from traditional horsemanship. The reins are held in the non-mallet hand, and pulled close to the pony's neck so the slightest movement will provoke a response from the pony. Turning, accelerating and decelerating quickly are essential in a fast-paced polo match, so ensuring that you're in tune with your mount is priority number one. Once you've got your hands in the right position, it's time for the body to follow. At a walk, Martin recommends sitting far back in the saddle, keeping your rein arm straight out over the pony's neck, with your legs slightly forward (heels pointing down, of course). As we move up through the paces, I'm taught the standard polo position; standing in the stirrups, knees braced against the front of the saddle, leaning slightly forward over the pony's neck. 'This is the perfect position to be in when you're getting ready to hit the ball,' Martin explains. As we speed up, I learn that polo players rise to the canter as well as the trot. Staying balanced on the balls of your feet through the loping gait is certainly a challenge, especially with only one hand on the reins.

'When you need to slow the pony down, you sit back, and that will prompt them to change pace,' Martin instructs.

'This is also a more secure position for a sudden stop.'

He's not wrong; the first time we slow down from a canter I pull gently on the reins but forget to sit back, and nearly end up over the pony's ears as we come to a jarring halt. I'm ready for the sensation on my second attempt, and can see why having such swift reactions comes in handy when players have to stop, pivot and accelerate away during a match.

THE SWING

Later, perched atop a sedentary wooden mount, Martin runs me through the basics of the polo swing. My right arm suddenly feels useful again as I practise the pendulum motion, ensuring my mallet swishes the grass each time – a sure guide that I'll hit the right spot on the ball, Martin explains. Once I've got the hang of twisting slightly in my saddle to make the most of the swing, it's time to introduce the ball. The iconic 'chink' sound as I connect mallet to ball for the first time is extremely satisfying, and after a few tries, I can even hit in a straight line. 'It's all in the timing,' Martin advises. 'That's what a lot of new players find difficult – you have to adjust your swing for each gait; the faster you go, the less time you have to prepare. That's why you see a lot of people missing the ball when they're charging down the pitch.'

Well, I'm not quite at the charging level yet, but I am itching for an opportunity to put my new skills together out on the stick-and-ball field.

Prices start from £95 per hour for a group lesson, £110 for a private lesson. For more information, contact head coach Charlie Wood on 020 8334 0000/07880 887 777 or email lessons@hampoloclub.com





● LEARN TO RIDE

Think polo looks fun, but aren't yet comfortable on horseback? Time to try a crash course at one of these local stables

KINGSTON RIDING CENTRE

Prices start from £40 for a 30-minute weekday ride and £50 for a 30-minute weekend ride.

38 Crescent Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7RG,
020 8546 6361 (kingstonridingcentre.com)

WIMBLEDON VILLAGE STABLES

Prices start from £60 per hour for a weekday ride (£40 for members) and £65 per hour for a weekend ride (£45 for members). Membership starts from £330 per year.

Wimbledon Village Stables, 24a/b High Street, Wimbledon,
SW19 5DX, 020 8946 8579 (wostables.com)

STAG LODGE STABLES

Prices start from £35 per hour for a weekday ride (£25 for children) and £65 for a weekend ride (£30 for children). Also available is the 'learn to ride in a day' course, £175. ■

Stag Lodge Stables, Robin Hood Gate, Richmond Park,
SW15 3RS, 020 8974 6066 or Stag Lodge 2, 197 Robin
Hood Way, SW20 0AA, 020 8949 6999
(ridinginlondon.com)

WORDS / Jennifer Mason

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Opportunities to watch the experts in action before the season ends

AUGUST

Sunday 10	Kingfisher Cup, Indian Army Trophy
Sunday 17	Stagshead – Young England, Finalista Cup
Sunday 24	Roehampton Cup Tournament Final, Critchley Trophy
Sunday 31	Candilio Cup, Jimmy Edwards Trophy

SEPTEMBER

Saturday 6	HAC 105 International Day [ticketed]
Sunday 7	Hunt Kendall Bowl, Polo Challenge
Thursday 11	White Island Polo Day [ticketed]
Friday 12	The Chakravarty Cup [ticketed]
Sunday 14	Autumn Cup, David Brown I
Sunday 21	Billy Walsh Tournament Final, Sladmore Trophy, Floating Seat
Saturday 27	Summer League Final [ticketed], Peggy Healy Trophy, Gaucho International Polo Festival
Sunday 28	Farewell Cup, Asprey Red Cross Cup, Aylesford Trophy

Entry £5 per person, Ham Polo Club, Petersham Close,
Richmond, TW10 7AH, 020 8334 0000 (hampoloclub.com)